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THE RISEN BODY

A PAPER READ BEFORE A SOCIETY
AT WINCHESTER

TO OPEN A DISCUSSION ON

DR. SPARROW SIMPSON'S 'THE RESURRECTION
AND MODERN THOUGHT'

BY

THE REV. WILFRID RICHMOND
VICAR OF VALLEY END

LONGMANS, GREEN, AND CO.
39 PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON
NEW YORK, BOMBAY AND CALCUTTA

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THE RISEN BODY

DR. SPARROW SIMPSON'S book covers a great variety of subjects connected with our Lord's Resurrection. I suppose we should say that the three main questions to which it directs our attention are :

1. What is the evidence for the Resurrection ?
2. What was the nature of the Risen Body ?
3. What is the importance of the Resurrection in the Gospel of Salvation ?

Of these three I should say that the second question, as to the nature of the Risen Body, is the main point of interest in the book ; and, more particularly, the problem how to harmonize the indications as to the nature of the Risen Body in the stories of the Appearances in the Gospels with the teaching as to the Risen Body in the Epistles of St. Paul.

The third question, as to the importance of the Resurrection in the Gospel of Salvation, will necessarily come under consideration to a certain extent in determining St. Paul's view as to the nature of the Risen Body.

As to the first question, it might seem at first sight more logical to ask what is the evidence for a Resurrection before we ask what we mean by a Resurrection. But the other is, I think, the true order. We must have as definite an idea as we can what we mean by resurrection, before we ask whether the evidence for such a resurrection is sufficient and convincing. A very different degree and

kind of evidence might be required according to the nature of the fact to be established.

There is, however, one form in which the question as to the evidence is put on which I might say a word to begin with. Can we say, it is asked, that the Resurrection is as certain as any fact in history? Dr. Sparrow Simpson [1] answers this question in the negative. I should prefer to say that the question cannot be answered because it cannot be asked. The Resurrection, if there was a resurrection, is not 'as any other fact in history.' It is professedly unique. It is professedly central, in vital relation to all other facts of history, their climax, their transcendent explanation. It is as though we were to ask evidence for the existence of the world, or of experience as a whole, of the same kind as we ask for any particular experience, or for the existence of any particular thing. If the believer in the Resurrection is forced to give an answer to the question, he must give two answers. On the one hand, he must say the evidence for a central and unique fact cannot be of the same kind as the evidence for ordinary facts. On the other hand, he will say that the evidence is such as to give to the fact of the Resurrection a far higher kind of certainty than attaches to any ordinary fact.

Turning then to the main question as to the nature of the Risen Body, I find myself obliged to preface what I have to say with some considerations as to the relations of body and spirit.

Dr. Sparrow Simpson [2], when he is about to formulate his conclusions on the doctrine of the Resurrection Body, refers to two passages in the late Dr. Moberly's

[1] p. 443.

[2] p. 411; 'Problems and Principles,' p. 358; 'Ministerial Priesthood,' p. 40.

writings. Body, he says, is the method of spiritual life, the means of the manifestation, the expression of spirit. I should put side by side with this a sentence in Prof. Bergson's address to the Psychical Research Society ('The Times,' Thursday, 29 May, 1913): "It is by their bodies that the different human personalities are radically distinct." Combining these two ideas, I should say that body is the medium of that distinction between spirit and spirit, which is the condition of their communion with one another, and it is the method of their manifestation to one another, the medium of communion between spirit and spirit. This points rather in the direction of the view [1] that body and soul are not so much two things as two different aspects of the same thing. Newman [2] says, 'We are apt to speak of soul and body as if we could distinguish between them and knew much about them, but for the most part we use words without meaning. It is useful indeed to make the distinction, and Scripture makes it, but after all the Gospel speaks of our nature, in a religious sense, as one. Soul and body make up one man which is born once and never dies.'" So Goulburn [3]: 'Is matter no less than spirit an essential constituent of that nature, so that the primitive constitution of the creature would be altered and man would cease to be man if the natural element no longer attached to him?'

Can we, in fact, or are we called upon to conceive a life of the human spirit without body? Without this present body, yes—but without body at all, to be, what we have seen that body is, the medium of distinction and of manifestation and communion between spirit and spirit?

[1] See Arist. 'De Anima,' 413; cp. Spenser:
"For of the soule the bodie forme doth take,
For soule is forme and doth the bodie make."
[2] 'Paroch. Serm.', I, 273.
[3] 'Bampton Lectures,' p. 33; S. S., p. 394.

Even in the Divine Being itself, where there must be the eternal archetype of every element in creation, do we not see in the element of distinction of persons in the Holy Trinity as the basis of the perfect communion of the Divine Unity, something of which we may say that it is the Eternal Archetype of that which in the life of human spirits we call by the name of body ?

These considerations may not seem to lead to any very definite conclusion, but they may nevertheless do something towards showing us the region in which we are venturing to speculate when we endeavour to formulate our ideas as to the Resurrection Body.

Coming then to the contrast between the Pauline and the Gospel presentation, I think it is best in appreciating the Pauline view to see first what is the place of the Resurrection of our Lord in the Pauline Gospel of Salvation.

The central points are, I think, two : (1) [1] that our moral resurrection, our renewal, is the effect of our mystical union with the risen Christ ; (2) [2] that our future bodily resurrection is also represented as the result of our union with the risen Christ, the climax and crown of our moral resurrection now in process, the completion of the transformation of our nature by the indwelling life of Christ.

If we go behind this we see that it implies the teaching of the first chapter of the Ephesians[3] as to the Resurrection of our Lord Himself. This teaching is in harmony, as Dr. Sparrow Simpson observes, with our Lord's words in the Emmaus story, ' Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into His glory ? ' The Resurrection is instrumental in the exaltation of Christ.

[1] Romans VI. 3–11 ; S. S., p. 304.
[2] Romans VIII. 10, 11 ; S. S., p. 312.
[3] S. S., p. 293.

The Resurrection perfects His Human nature. In the Resurrection human nature achieves for the first time its ideal state. This completion, this perfecting of human nature had to be in Him that it might be in us. We may shrink from applying to Him the word 'justification.' But yet I think we must go so far as to say that this perfecting of human nature in Him was the attainment of a moral condition not attained before. We shall see this clearly, I think, if we ask ourselves whether anything answering to the moral struggle of the Agony would be conceivable after the Resurrection. Plainly it would not. In Him the victory was won.

The importance of this view of the place of the Resurrection in the Gospel of Salvation for our present purpose lies in this. It implies throughout, in Him and in us, a continuity between the body before the Resurrection and the body risen.

This thought then of a bodily continuity through death and resurrection we take with us to the interpretation of the crucial passage in 1 Corinthians xv. Here it should be observed first that, to St. Paul, the Appearances, as he knew them, were not out of harmony with the nature of the risen body as he pictures it. To suppose otherwise would be to break the back of the argument of the passage as a whole. Next we may note, in the summary of the witness to the Resurrection at the beginning of the chapter, that in the successive statements 'He was buried,' 'He hath been raised,' a continuity between the body which was buried and the body which was raised is the natural implication of the words.

Passing to the later passages which contrast the natural and the spiritual body, we come to the analogy or illustration of the seed. I suppose it admits of question how far this analogy is to be pressed. Origen's

interpretation [1] appears to be that, as in the seed so in the body that dies [2], there is a principle that germinates from which, in the one case as in the other, the new body is developed. Whether this principle, the 'ratio insita' of Origen, as quoted by St. Jerome, is conceived as physical or not, it would perhaps be difficult to say. Probably he would not have put the question to himself quite in the sense in which we put it. Goulburn's answer to the question [3] is that the body which shall be raised 'is some elementary material basis, not apprehensible by our present faculties, which lies at the root of those superficial phenomena exhibited by all matter, and by the human body, which is matter organized in a particular form.'

This is at least a way of presenting to the imagination the continuity, through death and the intermediate state and the resurrection, between the natural and the spiritual body. Apart from this metaphor or analogy and its implication, continuity, amounting to a real identity, between the body that dies and the body that is raised, is implied in the words used later of those who are alive at the great day, 'We shall be changed'; and such continuity is implied, I should say, in the form of the sentences whose burden is the vast and incalculable difference between the two, 'It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption; it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.'

It is this vast and incalculable difference between the

[1] S. S., p. 349.

[2] It is perhaps necessary to say that I should take the life of the living body, not the burial of the dead body, to be the parallel to the sowing of the seed.

[3] 'Bampton Lectures,' p. 34; S. S., 394.

body that dies and the body that is raised which seems to stand in such startling contrast with the appearances in the Gospels. I do not wish to underrate the difficulty; but there is one point on which I must say something in detail. So far where I have differed at all from Dr. Sparrow Simpson, I have indicated without emphasizing my difference. As to the stress which he lays and the interpretation he puts [1] upon 'Flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God,' I am not content to do this. I think his view of the passage is untenable. Broadly speaking, throughout St. Paul's Epistles the prevailing meaning of 'the flesh' is mere humanity—humanity apart from grace, humanity apart from God, humanity apart from the spirit. I am convinced that this sense rules the present passage. Of the two passages in which St. Paul speaks of flesh and blood (curiously, I think, unnoticed by Dr. Sparrow Simpson), Galatians I. 16, 'I conferred not with flesh and blood,' points in this direction. The meaning there is simply, I conferred not with man—with man as contrasted with God. And Ephesians VI. 12, 'Our wrestling is not against flesh and blood,' similarly means, our conflict is not merely with man, but with great spiritual forces. To make 'flesh and blood' mean our present physical organization is to travel altogether outside the range of St. Paul's thoughts about the flesh. But the contrast between the whole view of the risen body suggested by this chapter in the Corinthians and the details of the Gospel appearances remains, without the misinterpretation, as I think it, of this passage, and presents a real problem.

I need not dwell upon the details of the appearances, they are sufficiently familiar. Many of them are in

[1] S. S., p. 332.

very marked harmony with the picture of the risen body suggested by 1 Corinthians xv., e.g. the difficulty of recognition, the passing through closed doors. Perhaps the extreme point of difficulty is reached in the two points in the Lucan story of the appearances on the evening of Easter Day—'A spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see Me have,' and 'He did eat before them.'

I would point out that the difficulty here is twofold. Apart from the difficulty of reconciling these conditions of our present natural body with St. Paul's description of the spiritual body, there is, I think, a more potent difficulty arising from the persistent taint of Gnosticism in our habitual thought about the body. Against this I would plead that we should be perpetually on our guard. Day by day new wonders are unfolding themselves before the eyes of science as to our physical organization and the ultimate constitution of the material world. The hopes of biologists are travelling forward to a time when so far from the phenomena of life being explicable by mechanical and chemical laws, vital phenomena will yield up the secret of the ultimate constitution of matter. Matter itself is being resolved into something of which we can only say that according to the ordinary measures of thought and language it is immaterial. The world is no longer to science the dead and rigid system of known mechanical laws, but rather the very field of wonder, where expectation is awake to greet the new facts and principles which are unfolding themselves, and nothing is too strange or too unexpected to be true. Is all this revelation of wonder to go for nothing, to be rolled up and thrown away, the cast-off garment of reality, and not rather 'der Gottheit lebendiges Kleid,' the revealing medium from which will break, within which will unfold

themselves the further revelations of the life to come? And if so, who are we that we should fix upon this or that detail of our present physical organization the stigma of unworthiness, as though it were unfit to have any connection with the glory that shall be revealed in us? At any rate we must, I think, be careful, in the consideration of our present problem, not to allow the difficulty of reconciling St. Paul and the Gospels to be enhanced by what I would venture to call the prejudice of the imagination.

The real question as to this problem with which Dr. Sparrow Simpson leaves us is this: If we revolt from what he calls the materialist view of the Resurrection, even when it is presented in its most graceful and attractive form in the sermon of Newman's (Vol. I, xxi.) to which I have referred, if we revolt from it, not only because it ignores the whole trend of St. Paul's thought, but because it has become to us a physically unimaginable hypothesis, if we therefore accept what Dr. Sparrow Simpson calls the Origenist view of the Risen Body, suggested by 1 Corinthians xv., are we therefore bound to accept, as Dr. Sparrow Simpson does, the view that the appearances of the Gospels were 'economic and evidential'?

There is one point in favour of the view that they were economic and evidential, which I think Dr. Sparrow Simpson does not make. I mean the parallel of the Transfiguration. If our Lord could, in order to manifest His future glory, anticipate the glory, why should He not, in order to manifest the reality of the risen life to senses which He could only reach through such means, recur in part to the conditions of the body of the earthly life?

But the parallel does not to my mind meet the really

fatal objection to the view which Dr. Sparrow Simpson in the main adopts. I mean that it seems to me out of harmony with the character of God that the Church should be built on an illusion, affecting the very point on which assurance seemed to be given.

There is one passage in which Dr. Sparrow Simpson takes a different view, though he does not seem to be conscious of the difference.[1] 'In that glorified body the penetration of matter by spirit was so complete that He could at will re-enter into terrestrial conditions and become perceptible to the senses of human beings upon earth. It may be that such power is no unique prerogative of His Divinity, but part of the normal endowment of every perfected human individual.'

The painful implication of the terms economic and evidential no longer apply to the view here suggested. The passages in Bishop Gore's 'Body of Christ,' to which Dr. Sparrow Simpson refers[2] are suggestive in this connection. 'The risen body of Christ was spiritual . . . not because it was less than before material, but because in it matter was wholly and finally subjugated to spirit.' . . . 'The spirituality of the risen body of Christ lies not so much in any physical qualities as in the fact that His material presence is absolutely controlled by His spiritual will.' So in an unpublished paper read to the Synthetic Society (8 June, 1905) he speaks of St. Paul's conception of 'a spiritual body, which is no longer flesh and blood; i.e. is no longer in bondage to the weakness and limitation of our present life, but is still a body material and real, the perfect organ and expression of the spirit, but one among the various kinds of bodies which are to

[1] S. S., p. 418.
[2] 'Body of Christ,' pp. 127, 129; S. S., pp. 400, 413.

be found in the universe.' As he says again in 'The Body of Christ'[1]: 'From the physical point of view such spiritualization of matter as is involved in this conception of a spiritual body is becoming perhaps—I will not say more imaginable, but more and more conceivable, less out of analogy with our ultimate conception of matter.'

And if following another principle of Bishop Gore (as stated, e.g., in the Synthetic paper referred to) that 'Christ's humanity is in the New Testament regarded as normal in the sense that everything that belonged to His manhood is to belong to ours in and through Him,' if 'He is regarded as setting the standard of what humanity in the purpose of God is, through Him, capable of becoming,' if, following this line of thought, we *do* give the rein to imagination, and conceive that there are other worlds than ours, in any or all of which hereafter, manifesting itself here in one way and there in another, the spirit that is in us may, through the body with which it shall be clothed, do wider and more wondrous service to the glory of God, such dreams of fancy, if they be no more, may help the imagination to appropriate the facts as they are presented to us, and it is to the imagination rather than to the reason, as I have said, that the difficulty exists.

Two things I would venture to say in conclusion. We are in a region where definite theory is bound to be at fault. The words which Dr. Sparrow Simpson quotes from Latham's 'Risen Master'[2] have a wider application. 'What connection was there between the body that disappeared from the tomb and the body that the disciples were invited to handle? This, I believe, we cannot understand till we get out of the body ourselves.'

[1] p. 129; S. S., p. 401.
[2] p. 71; S. S., p. 400.

It is St. Augustine at his highest who says [1]: 'Whether the body shall become a spiritual body in such a way as to be called spiritual, because of a certain inevitable facility in its movements . . . on these and on many other things which may perplex us in the discussion of this subject, I confess that I have not yet read anywhere anything which I would esteem sufficiently established to desire to be either learned or taught by men.'

But, on the other hand, I would venture to insist that even where the data before us present problems and difficulties which at the present level of our intelligence and of our knowledge seem absolutely insoluble, we sin against reason and humanity alike if we tamper with testimony, and cut and carve the primâ facie facts to bring them within the compass of our present power of comprehension. The principle which Sabatier enunciated against Baur [2] strikes the note on which I am glad to close. 'Criticism may push its demands to a point at which, of necessity, any positive proof becomes impossible. This style of reasoning tends to nothing less than the destruction of all historical certainty, for in point of fact history depends on nothing else than subjective and individual testimony.'

I may seem already to have been trenching on the subject with which I have not professed to deal, the subject of the evidence of the Resurrection.

For us, I suppose, the primary evidence for the Resurrection is institutional. We should start from the Church and the Eucharist as institutions to be historically accounted for. But, in considering the institutional evidence, we should have to consider the part played by testimony in generating the facts which constitute the institutional evidence, and the degree of certainty which

[1] S. S., p. 363. [2] S. S., p. 166.

testimony imparts to particular elements in the story presented to us by the institutional evidence, such as, e.g., the empty tomb, or the third day. With what is to be said as to the value of testimony in this connection I am not now concerned.

All I am here concerned to say is this: If, which I do not think is the case, the Epistles of St. Paul and the stories of the Appearances in the Gospels present us with two views of the nature of the Risen Body, of which, with our present knowledge, we are not able to conceive a reconciliation, it is *not* a reasonable escape from the difficulty to explain away the testimony of writers, whose testimony, apart from this difficulty, we should accept as trustworthy and true.

My own main contention is that the result of a study of the problem in the light of modern thought is enormously to enlarge the bounds of possibility as to the reconciliation of the two presentations. And my belief is that in giving atmosphere to our belief in the Resurrection, by this larger view of the possibilities, we are taking up one great task of Christian faith—the spiritualization of matter.

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